

Testimony on Bills SB1053 and SB1060

3/11/15

Senator Slossberg, Representative Fleischmann, and members of the Education Committee. My name is Carolyn Goodridge and I am testifying in support of Bill SB 1053, An Act Prohibiting Out-of-School Suspensions and Expulsions for Students in Preschool and Grades Kindergarten to Two, and in support of bill SB 1060, An Act Concerning the Use of Restraint and Seclusion in Schools. I have worked in the field of Child Welfare for over thirty years. When children have severe behavioral issues under age seven, it is usually an indication of some underlying trauma issues. By suspending or expelling the child, the message to the child is that the child is bad. It does not resolve the behavior and may actually increase behaviors. If these children have underlying trauma issues, they are already struggling to learn; by sending them home, there is more instruction time lost. Several years ago I was involved with a child who was sent home 100 of the 180 days, and he was under eight years old. If the schools cannot identify these children and assess them for services, the behaviors will increase with age. It is particularly concerning that the majority of children under seven who are suspended and expelled are minority children. The reports show an increase of 22% in expulsion/suspensions of children under age seven.

SB 1060 seeks to eliminate the use of restraints and seclusions in schools. Seclusion is different from a "time-out". A "time-out" is a temporary removal from a situation for positive reinforcement. Seclusion and restraint are physical control and punishment. If a child has suffered abuse at home (by being locked in a closet, for example), the seclusion of being locked in a small room (closet) could bring back all that trauma and escalate behaviors rather than calming them. For the non-verbal children and autistic children, expression of their feelings is generally in behavior; for those children, the behaviors can also escalate in those situations. I support the Child Advocate's report which recommends: more training, support, and capacity building in schools to meet the varied learning needs of children with and without disabilities, and increase in monitoring and evaluation of restraint and seclusion in school.

Thank you for your time.